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19 October 1962

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING ACTIONS AGAINST THE SOVIET-  
CUBAN MILITARY THREAT.

The Intelligence Community has provided the Administration with comprehensive and current information concerning developments in Cuba. The United States Intelligence Board has prepared several estimates on the implication of these developments and the consequences of possible United States action.

Since I have been participating in the policy discussions concerning possible actions and from time to time have expressed views on policy matters beyond my competence as DCI, I feel compelled to now express my personal opinion concerning the course of action now being considered.

First, I think we are having difficulty in determining a clear-cut course of action because we have not clearly defined exactly wherein lies our most important and vital interest.

It is my conviction that, while Berlin is important and also the NATO alliance and arrangements with many other countries throughout the world, nevertheless, I have reached the conclusion

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that maintaining maximum security and safety of the United States and of the Western Hemisphere, cementing Western Hemisphere relationships, and reversing the growth of communism in the Western Hemisphere represent our most important national interest and must be our over-riding concern.

I feel that a continued build-up of a Soviet-Cuban military capability of an offensive nature, with the strong probability that there will exist in Cuba a large number of operational missiles and aircraft equipped with nuclear weapons of the megaton range capable of striking the United States, the Panama Canal and most Latin American countries, constitutes a situation that we cannot tolerate.

Of equal importance is the fact that Castro's accomplishments will be a challenge to every dissident group in countries throughout Latin America. It is my personal opinion that this will result in Latin American countries from Mexico in the north to Argentina in the south seeking ever closer ties with the Soviet Union because of demonstrated Soviet strength and power. Conversely, these Latin Americans will move away from alliance with or dependence upon the United States because of our own demonstrated weakness and lack of resolution.

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What is at stake here then, in my opinion, is Western Hemisphere security and the inevitable growth of communism in Latin America. These two considerations are over-riding in their importance. Actions required to insure Hemisphere security and stop the advance of communism in the Hemisphere are of more immediate concern to our vital national interests than are the problems that confront us in more distant areas.

Turning to the suggested plan of action, I do not believe a partial blockade or, for that matter a total blockade, is a satisfactory answer. It might have been an acceptable answer had the offensive missiles and planes not been delivered to Cuba. However, they are there now. They represent a serious threat, and a blockade will not remove them. Indeed, the blockade, which must be maintained for a protracted period, will provide an opportunity to place all systems in an operational status. This means the establishment of a capability of almost instantaneous delivery of a substantial megatonnage of nuclear weapons. At this point the opportunity of reversing the situation is remote for then military action on our part would possibly invite a retaliation which would inflict upon us unacceptable damage. Hence the blockade will not solve the problem that confronts us.

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During the period of the blockade, Khrushchev will lay before world opinion through the United Nations and elsewhere, facts with respect to United States deployment of offensive capabilities and nuclear weapons throughout the world and thus establish that in effect what has occurred in Cuba is only a small fraction of that which we have done through the years in many places throughout the world. It is my opinion that the propaganda attack and the world public opinion which would support it would be of such intensity that we would have to reconsider our blockade policy almost immediately.

The American public will realize that there exists in Cuba the power to wreak the greatest of havoc in the United States and in Latin America. Hence there will be great fear and distress among the American people and disenchantment with our policies. The same attitude will prevail among people in all countries of Latin America.

I therefore oppose the blockade idea, and strongly recommend that we act more decisively. I think we should issue an ultimatum to Castro at once. I think we should tell him to cease and desist and to remove all such offensive armaments, including missiles, MIG 21s, IL 28s, etc., or we will remove them for him. I think we should give Khrushchev notice of contemplated action and tell him to remove

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the Soviet bloc technicians and military personnel at once or assume the inevitable consequence of having his people harmed. Such warnings should be planned and timed to be adequate for their purpose, but to have the minimum effect upon any military operation. If, in the opinion of military authority, the consequences of the warnings would render a military operation of questionable effectiveness or risk the possibility of a missile being fired at the United States, then there should be no warning.

Having done this, I believe we should take over Cuba by military means, remove the threat and also remove the Castro-Communist government and establish in Cuba a government which will serve the interests of the Cuban people and become a member of the Western Hemisphere community of nations.

The action I am proposing is drastic. However, I believe it conforms to, and the risks are consistent with American policy as stated publicly by President Kennedy on 13 September. The President said in part:

"If at any time the Communist build-up in Cuba were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way, including our base at Guantanamo, our passage through the Panama Canal, our missile and

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space activities at Cape Canaveral, or the lives of American citizens in this country, or if Cuba should ever attempt to export its aggressive purposes by force or the threat of force against any nation in this Hemisphere, or become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies."

John A. McCone

The above is representative of the personal views of John A. McCone, as an individual, and is not to be construed as representative of the views of, or a recommendation of, the United States Intelligence Board or the Central Intelligence Agency.

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